

## Student's Attitudes and Perceptions Regarding Campus Tobacco Policy

**Background:** This project was based on a service learning (S-L) project. Our Community Partner was the Coordinator of Tompkins County Health Department, Tobacco Prevention Program. Our objectives was to improve the quality of life of our community by conducting a needs assessment on a health related topic; focusing on tobacco prevention and policy.

Tobacco related illnesses cause death to approximately 5.4 million people worldwide (CDC, 2017) and 2.5 million deaths occurred due to secondhand smoke. The prevalence of tobacco users according to the World Health Organization in 2015 was 1.1 billion people (WHO, 2016). According to the Center for Disease Control, between 11.8% and 29.0% of New York State residents smoke. In Tompkins County, where Ithaca College (IC) is located, the average tobacco use is 20%, less than the surrounding areas in Upstate New York. Of those residents, 18.2% used cigarettes, 1.4% used non-cigarette tobacco products, such as an e-cigarette, 0.6% are using a mix of cigarette and non cigarette tobacco products. 9.0% of IC students reported using tobacco cigarette products, just under the national rate of 9.3% (American College Health Data Assessment (ACHA, 2017).

Numerous programs and policies aim to prevent tobacco use at various levels. Aside from many federal and state regulations, it is reported that 2,106 campuses across the country are 100% smoke free, however, IC does not fall into this category. Based on the 2010 IC Smoking Policy, smoking was prohibited in indoor facilities (IC, 2018). This was the current policy when this project was conducted.

As of May 2018, new language was added to the policy including “personal vaporizers or other devices associated with vaping” as smoking products prohibited in campus facilities. Smoking is prohibited within 20 feet of building entrances, as required by the New York State Department of Health (IC, 2019).

Previous research conducted of IC students’ perception on smoking policy showed that 61% of students were concerned with secondhand smoke exposure and 47% said they think IC should become a smoke free campus (Office of Research, IC, 2011). Another follow up research done in 2015, show that 50% were likely or very likely to support the smoking ban and 37% did not support the ban. However, the sample size was very small to make any conclusions (2015). Therefore, the purpose of our research was to gather current data on the attitudes and perceptions about a Tobacco free policy on IC’s campus

**Methods:** A cross sectional study design was used to gather data. An 18-item survey was developed to measure smoking status of the IC students, perceptions, and attitudes about existing issues and their support for a smoke free campus. The Transtheoretical Model was used to examine participants’ current smoking status. There was one open ended question for their comments. The Ithaca College Review Committee approved the project. The survey was distributed using Qualtrics software system to 3,050 students. We received 550 completed surveys.

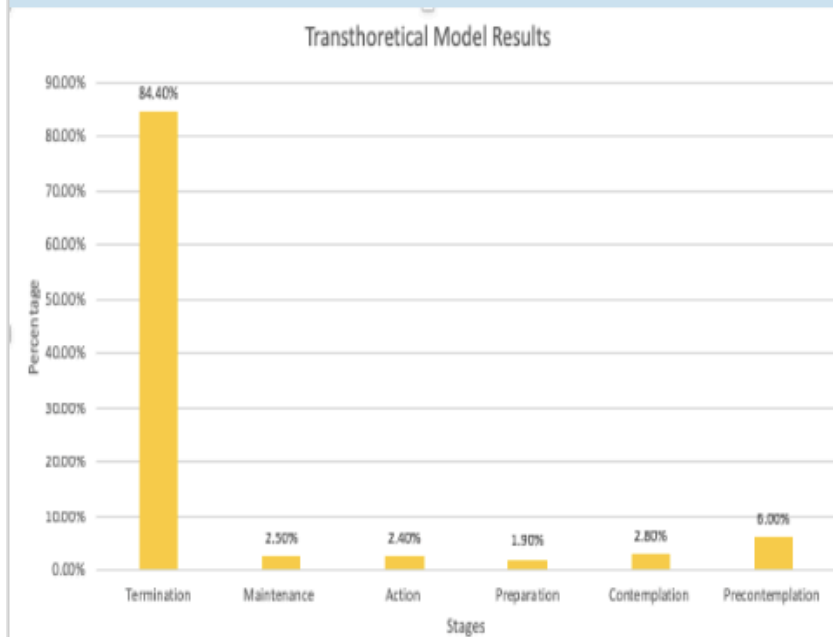
**Results:** Of the total participants, 7% identified as smokers, 4.67% have considered quitting, and 3.26% did not intend to quit. The most prevalent products used on our campus are cigarettes (72.9%) and e-cigarettes (25%). Out of total, 44.97% would support smoke free campus and 34.02% would not and 21.01% were undecided. A Chi square test ( $p < .05$ ) revealed that the attitudes about supporting a Smoke Free Policy on campus was significantly different by their

smoking status, gender, and school. Smokers were less likely to support the policy. Qualitative data showed that participants perceived smoking and secondhand smoke exposure as a problem.

**Discussion:** Based on the results, the majority of students would support the ban. It is evident from all the studies done in the past. A closer look at the data indicated that there is a difference in students' perceptions based on who they are. It was evident that nonsmokers are more likely to support than the smokers. Since the majority are non-smokers on campus we conclude that a complete tobacco ban or better policy would benefit the campus environment and promote healthier lifestyles for students and eliminate secondhand smoke exposure. We strongly recommend that the current smoking policy should actively be updated and enforced with progression towards a potential ban.

## Appendix A

### Transtheoretical Model



- **Termination:** Non Smokers
- **Maintenance:** Former smoker, continuously quit for longer than six months
- **Action:** Former smoker, continuously quit less than six months
- **Preparation:** Seriously plan to quit
- **Contemplation:** Current smoker, seriously plan on quitting in the next six months
- **Precontemplation:** Current smoker, not planning on quitting in the next six months

## Appendix B

### Percent of People who disagreed or agreed on the following statements

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Smoking tobacco products can lead to health complications	2.59	0.18	1.11	7.58	88.54	4.79
Social events increase likelihood of smoking tobacco among students	2.40	8.13	14.60	37.89	36.97	3.99
Resource availability on IC campus should be enough to help people stop smoking	8.89	17.04	30.19	24.63	19.26	3.28
The current smoking policy at IC is effective at preventing second-hand smoke exposure	10.17	22.18	24.95	28.47	14.23	3.14
The current smoking policy at IC is regularly and effectively enforced	14.60	22.92	41.77	13.86	6.84	2.75
Smoking tobacco products is a problem on campus	21.93	25.84	28.25	17.66	6.32	2.61
This current smoking policy at IC campus enables people to smoke tobacco.	8.57	12.29	33.33	30.54	15.27	3.32
Presence of ashtrays on campus suggests that IC is supporting tobacco smoking behaviors	22.08	21.89	24.68	20.59	10.76	2.76
When I see people using tobacco products on campus it makes me think about their and others health	14.87	12.83	17.47	31.41	23.42	3.36
Ithaca college does not have any problems with the secondhand smoke exposure	9.63	27.04	33.33	18.33	11.67	2.95

## Appendix C

Difference in attitude about smoking ban by smoking status, by gender, and school (likley or unlikley)					
Category	Items	n	$\chi^2$	df	p-value
Smoking status	How likley they support a smoking ban	575	177.3	20	0.00
Gender		543	63.59	20	0.00
School		542	49.1	16	0.00

## References

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